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Yemelianova, Galina

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# Islam, national identity and politics in contemporary Kazakhstan

G.M. Yemelianova\*

Centre for Russian and East European Studies, College of Social Sciences, The University of Birmingham, Birmingham, UK

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This article argues that, unlike other Central Asian states, the official response in Kazakhstan to its Islamic revival is distinctively ambivalent and even contradictory. The Nazarbayev government has rhetorically embraced the Kazakh qoja-centred Sufi heritage and the Hanafi school of Sunni Islam as the 'traditional' forms of Islam among Kazakh nomads and perceived them as constituent elements of the nation-building process. However, the representatives of the political elite have in reality unknowingly absorbed much of 'untraditional' Salafi Islam and ignored, marginalised or even suppressed the revival of Kazakh Sufism. This is in part because of their limited knowledge of the indigenous Kazakh Islamic tradition and in part due to the younger generation's greater exposure to a range of Salafi-dominated influences emanating from abroad. The article begins with a brief historical perspective on the relationship between qoja-centred Sufism and 'Kazakh-ness' which is essential for establishing an analysis of the fissures in the current religious and political ideology pertaining to Kazakh nation-building.

Keywords: Central Asia; Kazakhstan; Islam; Sufism; ethnicity; nationalism

## Introduction

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Since the collapse of the Soviet system and the break-up of the USSR in 1991 the political elite of independent Kazakhstan has embarked on the process of state- and nation-building involving a search for a new consolidating national ideology which would provide a viable alternative to the previously dominant Soviet nationhood. As in other parts of the former Soviet Union the post-Soviet Kazakhstani leadership has largely rejected the Soviet-ness which they equated with Russian domination and instead turned to their pre-Soviet national heritage. Central elements of this heritage are primordially perceived Kazakh ethno-nationalism and distinctive qoja-centred Sufi Islam which historically was an integral part of Kazakh national identity.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, Kazakhstan has been politically and culturally re-connected to the wider Turkic and Islamic world; Kazakh ethnic and Islamic symbols have been introduced into public life; and the country has experienced an Islamic revival which has manifested itself in the public display of Islamic belonging, and a steep rise in the number of mosques, madrasas, Islamic publishing houses, hajjees (pilgrims to Mecca and Medina) and Kazakh students studying Islam in Kazakhstan and abroad.

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The official construction of the new national ideology has encountered two major challenges.<sup>2</sup> One has related to the multi-ethnic and poly-confessional composition of Kazakhstan's population in which ethnic Kazakhs constitute just over 60%.<sup>3</sup> The other has

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\*Email: g.yemelianova@bham.ac.uk

been the elite's ambivalent relations with Islam. Thus, unlike other Central Asian states, the Nazarbayev government has rhetorically embraced qoja-centred Sufism as the 'traditional' form of Islam among Kazakh nomads and as a constituent element of the nation-building process. However, the representatives of the political elite have in reality unknowingly absorbed much of 'untraditional' Salafi Islam and ignored, marginalised or even suppressed the revival of Kazakh Sufism. This is in part because of their limited knowledge of the indigenous Kazakh Islamic tradition and their greater exposure to cultural and linguistic Russification; and in part due to the influx of immigrant Kazakhs (oralmans) from the Islamic abroad and the younger generation's greater exposure to a range of foreign Salafi-dominated influences.<sup>4</sup> A corollary has been the increasing penetration of the Kazakhstani political establishment by young and often Western-educated Kazakhs who subscribe to the Salafi version of Islam.

This article focuses on the role of Islam in Kazakh nation-building. It begins with a brief historical perspective on the relationship between qoja-related Sufism and 'Kazakhness,' which has defined the development of the Kazakh nation. It then proceeds to an analysis of the major vectors of Islamic revival and its deployment by the Kazakhstani political and Islamic establishment. The article concludes by assessing the implications of indirect and partial Salafisation of the ethnic Kazakh elite for the Kazakhstani polity and society. The article is based on the findings of a three-year long INSPIRE project, 2010–13, funded by the British Council. The research methodology involved the textual analysis of primary and secondary printed materials, ethnographic observation and semi-structured interviews with Kazakhstani policy-makers, academics, leaders and rank-a-file members of the Islamic Spiritual Board of Kazakhstan, activists of 'unofficial' Islam and life story interviews with 'ordinary' Muslims.

### An Islamic component of Kazakh-ness: a historical perspective

For centuries Kazakh-ness has been interwoven with Islam but the distinctively nomadic Kazakh past has accounted for significant differences in this relationship compared to their sedentary neighbours, the Uzbeks and Tajiks, in particular. In the case of the latter, Islam was the major social, legal and cultural regulator from the seventh century AD, when they were Islamised by Arabs invading the Ferghana valley (Mawarannahr) from Mesopotamia.<sup>5</sup> By contrast, the proto-Kazakhs, who were always on the move, initially had a very superficial exposure to Islam and persisted with their traditional beliefs and invocations which combined elements of tengrism, shamanism, Zoroastrianism and Buddhism. They believed in the harmonious unity between humans and the surrounding world, the blue skies and endless steppe, and in particular, the helping power of ancestral spirits and the cult of saints and batyrs (military chieftains).<sup>6</sup> The process of the proto-Kazakhs' Islamisation received an impetus as a result of their formal incorporation within the Islamised Turkic and Turco-Mongol empires of Karakhanids, Gengizids and Timurids, which dominated Central Asia between the tenth and fifteenth centuries. During this period a number of Kazakh khans and other representatives of the Kazakh aristocracy, known as *aq suyek* ('white bone'),<sup>7</sup> as well as some ordinary Kazakhs from *kara suyek* ('black bone') converted to Sunni Islam of Hanafi madhhab.<sup>8</sup> From the fifteenth century Islam became the official religion of the Kazakh Khanate which marked the beginning of the Kazakh nation. Since then Islam has steadily proliferated across various strata of Kazakh society.<sup>9</sup>

The Kazakhs' nomadism, which did not allow for mosque-based worship, accounted for the wide diffusion among them of Sufism (mystical Islam), which historically

developed in opposition to established mosque-centred Islam. Sufi Islam also more easily appropriated non-Islamic practices, like the veneration of tombs and other traditional places of worship as well as singing and the use of musical instruments. This integrated and localised, and often Sufi, Islam formed the essence of Kazakh vernacular Islam which differed substantially from Sufism among the Tajiks and Uzbeks, which drew on 90  
Iranicised Sufi written scholarship.<sup>10</sup> The main bearers of Kazakh Sufi Islam were qojas (Sufi shaykhs) who initially belonged to those aq suyek who claimed their descent from Muslim saints, from the Four Righteous Caliphs, or even from the Prophet Muhammad himself.<sup>11</sup> Until the fourteenth century qojas were formally associated with the Sufi tariqas (brotherhoods) of Yasawiyya, Qubraviyya and the Qadiriyya.<sup>12</sup> Qoja Ahmad 95  
Yasawi (1093–1166), the founder of the Yasawiyya, was in fact a native of the present-day town of Turkistan in southern Kazakhstan. Since the fourteenth century, however, most Kazakh qojas belonged to the Naqshbandi tariqa and traced their spiritual lineage and silsila (golden chain) from Abu Bakr, the first caliph of the Arab Caliphate.<sup>13</sup> According to Olcott, in the nineteenth century a number of Kazakh qojas switched to 100  
simplified forms of Sufism of both the Qadiri lineage which favoured the Sufis' vocal dhikr (remembrance of Allah), and the Mujaddidi Naqshbandiyya which, compared to the Kazakh mainstream Naqshbandiyya, favoured the social and political engagement of their followers.<sup>14</sup>

Qojas were highly respected among the Kazakhs belonging to both the aq suyek and 105  
the kara suyek. They oversaw the major family events related to the life cycle and acted as mediators in disputes over property, inheritance and other family and clan-related issues. In some cases they also played an important political role by representing the interests of Kazakh khans and biys (military chieftains).<sup>15</sup> At the same time the supreme authority in Kazakh society always remained with the military leaders of Gengizid descent. Qojas 110  
retained their high spiritual status after the Kazakhs had been introduced by Tatar mullas to mosque-centred Sunni Islam of the Hanafi madhhab from the late eighteenth century. This influx of Muslim Tatars in the Kazakh steppe occurred within the framework of Catherine the Great's (1762–96) policy of legalisation and management of her Muslim subjects. The Tatar-driven Islam was confined to officially registered 115  
mosques, madrasas, maktabas, waqfs (Islamic endowments) and shari'a courts which began to emerge in the Kazakh steppe from the early nineteenth century. All these Islamic institutions were almost entirely staffed by Tatar Muslim 'clergy' who were affiliated to the pro-government Orenburg muftiate (est. 1788). The advance of state-sponsored 'official' Islam undermined the authority of 'unofficial' Islam of Kazakh qojas. 120  
It is not surprising that the latter were critical of 'official' Islamic 'clergy' and distanced themselves from them.<sup>16</sup>

From the eighteenth century the development of Kazakh national identity was increasingly affected by the establishment of Russian control over the Kazakh steppe.<sup>17</sup> Russian rule was accompanied by the persistent erosion of Kazakh nomadism through the official 125  
policy of Kazakh settlement and through a massive influx of Cossack, Russian and other Slavic settlers, the ensuing dismantling of the supreme authority of the Kazakh military aristocracy from aq suyek, and its replacement by the Russian administration and the arrival of the politically and spiritually assertive Russian Orthodox Church.<sup>18</sup> The Russian authorities established a number of Kazakh-Russian schools with the aim of producing 130  
middle and low level Kazakh personnel for the Russian governing bodies in the Kazakh steppe. This introduced a major social and cultural divide into the Kazakh society in that a small Russified elite began to aspire to Russian cultural and political values, while other and more conservative members of the Kazakh elite, who were educated in madrasas, as

well as the vast majority of ordinary Kazakhs, remained loyal to their traditional Kazakh values intertwined with Islam.<sup>19</sup> Kazakh integration within the political and cultural fabric of the Russian empire was also conducive to the proliferation among the small educated Kazakh minority of ideas of the Tatar-generated Russified version of Islamic reformism, known as jadidism.<sup>20</sup> In the first decade of the twentieth century it was Kazakh jadis as well as graduates of Russo-Kazakh schools – both of whom defied qoja-centred Kazakh traditionalism – who formed the core of the Kazakh national movement under the leadership of the Party of Alash Orda [The Horde of Alash], which sought the political and cultural separation of the Kazakhs from the Russian empire.<sup>21</sup>

This social divide culminated during the Bolshevik takeover of Central Asia after 1917 when some left-wing representatives of the Kazakh jadid-minded elite backed the Soviets, while the majority of the Kazakh conservative elite, as well as a significant number of well-off Kazakhs, rejected the new regime and fled the country for neighbouring China, Iran, Afghanistan, Turkey and the wider Middle East. Under the Soviet rule, the ethno-national identity of the remaining, although much reduced, Kazakh population was further affected by the Bolshevik policy of ‘Small October’<sup>22</sup> which was aimed at complete eradication of nomadism among Kazakhs and their coercive settlement within the kolkhoz (collective farm) system. The Kazakhs were also subjected much more than their Central Asian neighbours to linguistic and cultural Russification due to a disproportional influx in Kazakhstan of Russian, Ukrainian and other settlers from western and central Russia during the ‘Virgin Lands’ campaign of the late 1950s. As a result, by 1960 the ethnic Kazakhs constituted less than 40% of Kazakhstan’s population.<sup>23</sup> The ethnic diversity of Soviet Kazakhstan was further enhanced by Kazakhstan’s designation as the main Soviet gulag. It was also made the main settlement site for numerous deportees, including Muslims from the North Caucasus.<sup>24</sup>

The Islamic side of Kazakh-ness was similarly undermined by the Stalinist atheistic policy which led to the liquidation, or a drastic reduction, of the number of both ‘official’ Islamic ‘clergy’ and ‘unofficial’ Islamic authorities, including Kazakh qojas. In the mid-1920s the institution of waqf was outlawed, and Islamic education was disrupted and reduced to a few hujras (educational groups) which continued to function illegally only in southern Kazakhstan.<sup>25</sup> In the 1940s, during a temporary religious thaw, the Kremlin allowed a limited restoration of ‘official’ Islam in the form of the Kazakhstani branch of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan (SADUM) with its centre in Tashkent.<sup>26</sup> The institutionalisation of the Soviet version of ‘official’ Islam was accompanied by the assertion of the supremacy of ethnic Uzbeks in Kazakhstan’s official Islamic institutions, which had been previously dominated by ethnic Tatars.<sup>27</sup> The Uzbek domination also accounted for Kazakh Muslims’ very restricted access to the only two centres of official Islamic education – Mir-i-Arab madrasa in Bukhara and the Islamic Institute in Tashkent – which were reopened in the 1970s. Kazakh qoja-centred Islam suffered further as a result of the SADUM’s de facto pro-Salafi leaning and overt hostility to Sufi Islam.

An outcome of the Soviet policies of coercive settlement of nomadic Kazakhs, their comprehensive Sovietisation, as well as the Stalinist atheistic assault on Islam was the complete destruction of nomadism and the disruption of the indigenous Islamic tradition associated with qojas. Nevertheless, the Kazakhs managed to at least partially safeguard their distinctive sense of Kazakh identity sometimes through their language, which persisted in rural regions, and significantly through the perpetuation of the juz and clan system, as well as through ‘folk’ Islam which was thoroughly integrated, though sometimes unconsciously, in Kazakh national custom.<sup>28</sup>

## Trajectories of Islamo-national revival

In the late Soviet period, Kazakhstan experienced a form of Islamic revival which was 185 however considerably less intensive than in neighbouring Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Initially, it was prompted by increased foreign Islamic activities in the country. Thus, Islamic funds and individual sponsors and preachers from Saudi Arabia, the Gulf states, Egypt, Turkey and other Muslim countries were behind the rapid construction in Kazakhstan of mosques and Islamic educational institutions,<sup>29</sup> and the development of 190 Islamic publishing and Arabic study groups.<sup>30</sup> Emissaries of the Turkey-based Said Nursi and Fethullah Gulen movements, as well as of Naqshbandi shaykhs Abd al-Baki Husayn, Ahmad Afandi and Mahmud Usta Osmanoglu, acquired a Kazakh following through their frequent visits to the country, enhanced by the linguistic and madhhab affinity between the Turks and Kazakhs.<sup>31</sup> Between 1990 and 2000 the number of registered mosques rose 195 from 40 to 2300 – in Almaty alone there were 24 mosques – but throughout the 1990s many of them, with the exception of Friday prayers, were sparsely attended. Nevertheless, behind the reluctance initially to demonstrate their Islamic religiosity there was a steady and significant growth of interest and commitment in the faith, especially among young Kazakhs who identified Islam as a key feature of their emergent post-Soviet national 200 identity. By the late 1990s already over 80% of ethnic Kazakhs identified themselves as Muslims, the majority young people under the age of 20.<sup>32</sup>

By the end of the twentieth century this initial foreign-defined Islamic revival in Kazakhstan was increasingly paralleled by an indigenous upsurge of Islamic activism, of both a Sufi and Salafi nature. Most socially active among the indigenous Sufi groups was 205 the Naqshbandi group of Ibrahim-Hazrat (1928–2009),<sup>33</sup> which became particularly active in the south of Kazakhstan. The group's silsila (chain of transmission of a Sufi tradition), which was provided to the author by Nasrettin-qari,<sup>34</sup> indicates that it belongs to the old Kazakh qoja lineage of descent, different from the Mujaddidi Naqshbandiis who arrived in Central Asia from India in the nineteenth century.<sup>35</sup> By the mid-1990s 210 Ibrahim-Hazrat had a number of khalifas (representatives) in different regions of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.<sup>36</sup> According to some estimates, the number of his followers varied between 20 and 30 thousand.<sup>37</sup> Another promoter of qoja-centred Sufism was shaykh Ismatulla Abdugappar, an oralman from Afghanistan.<sup>38</sup> Ismatulla, who combined 215 Yasawi practices with the Qadiri loud dhikr, claimed his spiritual descent from qoja Ahmad Yasawi. Members of his group infiltrated the spheres of education and mass media and established control over a number of cable TV channels. Until 2011 Ismatulla shaykh also headed the Yasawi educational society Senim-Bilim-Omir [Faith-Knowledge-Life]. He has particularly attracted a following among young small-businessmen and 220 professionals in Almaty, Karaganda, Jezkazgan, Jambyl and Kentau.<sup>39</sup>

From the 2000s the Islamic dynamic in Kazakhstan has been increasingly shaped by Kazakh Muslims who have embraced Salafi Islam, even though they have often done so without recognising or understanding the full implications of Salafi doctrine. Compared to Salafis in neighbouring Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, who drew consciously on both indi- 225 genous and foreign Salafi scholarship and teaching with which they were already thoroughly familiar, Kazakhstani Salafis have exclusively followed the ideas of foreign Islamic thinkers. This has largely been because of the disrupted Islamic tradition amongst the Kazakhs compared with their neighbours. The main sources of Kazakh Islamic education therefore have been translations into Russian and Kazakh of writings and speeches by Muhammad bin Jamil Zeno, Salih al-Suheimi, 'Abd al-Razzaq al-Badr, 230 Ibrahim al-Ruheili, El'mir Kuliev and other leading Islamic scholars of the Salafi school.



These books were produced either locally, by Al-Barakat Publishers (Almaty), or by various Islamic publishing houses in Azerbaijan and Russia. Among the most read sources has been Salih al-Suheimi's *The Basics of Faith in the Light of Qur'an and Sunna* (2008) in translation by El'mir Kuliev, an Azerbaijani Salafi, who refutes madhhab differences and treats the Kazakh qoja-centred veneration of saints and mazars as paganism. Since the 2000s Salafi Islam was propagated through the Islamic cable TV channel Asyr Arna [Light Path], available in both Kazakh and Russian, which was allegedly funded from Saudi Arabia.<sup>40</sup> Yet another source of unintended Salafi influence have been oralmans coming from neighbouring Muslim countries and regions and especially from Afghanistan, the official maddhab of which is Hanbalism (a variation of Salafism). It is notable that between 1991 and 2008 Kazakhstan received 706,041 oralmans, the bulk of whom settled in Almaty, Mangystau and Jambyl oblasts (regions).<sup>41</sup>

By contrast, politicised Salafism has had a minimal response among Kazakhs, at least so far. Until the 2000s there was only a small number of Islamic radicals in southern Kazakhstan, most of whom were ethnic Uzbeks.<sup>42</sup> They were part of the Islamist network of the Ferghana valley which included members and sympathisers of the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan (IRT), the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and their splinter groups, and the Hizb al-Tahrir al-Islamii (Party of Islamic Liberation, HT), all of whom sought the establishment of an Islamic state in the region.<sup>43</sup> Since the early 2000s, however, HT has strengthened its position among ethnic Kazakhs in the south of the country. Its activity has been centred on Islamic education through the distribution of leaflets in Kazakh, Uzbek and Russian, as well as the provision of welfare assistance to the most needy. It is widely believed that its base has been in the town of Kentau, near Turkistan. Due to the secretive nature of HT it is difficult to verify the information on its activities and membership in Kazakhstan, as well as in wider Central Asia. Depending on the particular source, in the 2000s, the number of tahriris in Kazakhstan varied between 200 and 5000 people.<sup>44</sup>

Since the 2000s there have been reports of ethnic Kazakhs' involvement in pro-violence Islamist groups which have been operating in Shymkent, Almaty, Aqtobe and Kokshetau. It is believed that those groups might have had links to the IMU and its splinter group the Jamaat Mujahedeen of Central Asia, the Taza Islam [Pure Islam], the Islamic Movement of Eastern Turkestan and the Tablighi Jamaat.<sup>45</sup> In recent years the IMU's activities have been reported in Turkistan.<sup>46</sup> There has also been a rise in ethnic Kazakhs' engagement in Islamist activities in Tajikistan, Daghestan and other Muslim regions of the former Soviet Union. In 2011 and 2012 western Kazakhstan was shocked by Islamist suicide attacks by ethnic Kazakhs who allegedly belonged to the Jund al-Khalifat [Soldiers of Caliphate], another splinter group of the IMU. They targeted security services in western Kazakhstan, which is the heart of the country's burgeoning oil industry and a home to many Western oil contractors and executives. According to online statements by the group's representatives, the attacks were triggered by the harsh new religious law of 2011 which compelled all religious organisations to re-register with the government and imposed new restrictions, including a ban on prayer in all government workplaces, including military bases.<sup>47</sup>

It could be argued that despite the low level of Islamism in Kazakhstan, compared with other Central Asian countries, its major causes have been pretty similar. These have included inadequate state economic policies resulting in poor conditions for the bulk of the population and a high unemployment rate among young people. Since the early 1990s over 25% of young people in southern Kazakhstan have been unemployed.<sup>48</sup> Many of the young people I interviewed have expressed their frustration with the government's

reluctance to address acute ecological, agricultural and wider socio-economic problems. A common cause has been the huge discrepancy between the living standards of the business and political elite and the rest of the population. In Kazakhstan this discrepancy has been exacerbated by the enormous gas and oil-related profits of the ruling political and business elite and foreign managers of BP, Chevron, ExxonMobil and other Western oil and gas companies operating in the country. Their demonstratively lavish lifestyle has contrasted with the relative and sometimes striking poverty of the vast majority of the population, including professionals such as doctors, teachers and other public sector employees. In the oil and gas fields in western Kazakhstan the economic grievances of the local population have been also fuelled by substantial differences in earnings between foreign and local employees of Western companies. The riots in the oil town of Zhanaozen in December 2011 were triggered by protests against the low wages of Kazakh oil workers.<sup>49</sup>

Among the other political drivers of Islamic radicalisation have been the stagnating neopatrimonial political regime of President Nazarbayev which has prevented social mobility and the emergence of a democratic political system with a viable political opposition as well as the development of an independent judiciary.<sup>50</sup> According to the Kazakh National Opinion Poll of 2008 the majority of Kazakhstanis were afraid to openly express their views.<sup>51</sup> The dependence of the judiciary on executive power and the endemic corruption of government and law enforcement officials have eroded people's trust in the court and justice system in general. Under these conditions some disillusioned young Kazakhs have turned to the Islamic alternative to the present regime. The attractiveness of radical Islam has also been increased due to the government's indiscriminate political and administrative suppression of followers of 'untraditional' Islam. Thus, many aggrieved relatives and friends of those dubiously charged with 'Islamic extremism,' have often become sympathetic to the Islamist message.<sup>52</sup>

### State and Islam

The relationship between the Nazarbayev government and Islam has been ambivalent. In 1990 it endorsed the formation of an independent muftiate of Kazakhstan under mufti Ratbek Nysanbai-uly,<sup>53</sup> an ethnic Kazakh, and began to employ Islamic symbols as part of its nationalising discourse against the Russian-dominated Soviet past. Islamic symbols were introduced in the new state architecture and monuments and the portraits of renowned Islamic figures (e.g. Al-Farabi or Alfarabius, as he is known in the West) appeared on Kazakh banknotes. The mausoleum of qoja Ahmad Yasawi in Turkistan was lavishly renovated. Independent Kazakhstan began to prioritise its relations with Turkey and other Muslim countries. The government welcomed the arrival in Kazakhstan of various foreign Islamic funds, organisations and teachers. In 1993 President Nazarbayev laid the foundation stone of the Egyptian University of Islamic Culture Nur-Mubarak which was funded by the government of Egypt.<sup>54</sup> In addition to this university, which was opened in 2001, the Kazakhstani government also welcomed the opening of the Turkish-funded International Kazakh-Turkish Universities of Ahmad Yasawi in Almaty and Taraz, Turkistan State University of Ahmad Yasawi and the South Kazakhstan Humanitarian Academy in Shymkent, funded by Jamaat al-Islah al-Ijtimayi [Society for Social Reform] in Kuwait. All of them were staffed by lecturers in Islam from Turkey, Egypt and Kuwait who based their teaching on syllabi from their home universities. Young Kazakhs also received numerous Islamic scholarships to study abroad and to conduct hajj (pilgrimage) and 'umra' (small hajj) to Mecca and Medina. During his first years in office President



Nazarbayev visited major Islamic countries and in 1994 conducted hajj to Mecca and Medina. In 1995 Kazakhstan became a member of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC).<sup>55</sup> Not just Nazarbayev's government but opposition parties which were formed in the early 1990s referred to Islam as an integral component of the Kazakh nation in their programmes.<sup>56</sup>

The embracing of some of the trappings of Islam by the political leadership of Nazarbayev's generation, together with its gestural recognition of it as an element of the new national identity, did not however signal its conversion to the faith in any more significant or determining way. This was largely due to the fact that President Nazarbayev and most of his ministers and other top officials, despite their formal deference towards Islam, had been formed as typical Soviet and communist party apparatchiks with an atheistic mindset. Hence, their interest in Islam for its own religious sake has been minimal, fundamentally believing as they do in the secular future of Kazakhstan and in the immunity of the Kazakhstani peoples, compared to Uzbeks and Tajiks, to the proselytising activities of various foreign missionaries, Muslims and Christian Protestants alike. They therefore initially kept Islam and the religious sphere as a whole outside their political priorities, focusing instead on the country's oil- and gas-related economic modernisation and its inter-ethnic stability. Consequently, the muftiate of Kazakhstan continued to function along Soviet lines by dealing primarily with matters of life-cycle Islamic ritual, remaining otherwise disengaged from grass-roots Kazakh Muslim communities and the rising tide of 'unofficial' Islam.

Until the late 1990s it did indeed look as if Kazakhstan was largely immune from the fact that the Islamic revivalist movement<sup>57</sup> was elsewhere on the rise and was becoming increasingly politicised in the Ferghana valley. Though there was some limited Islamist activism in southern Kazakhstan the government dismissed it as a foreign – i.e. Uzbek – phenomenon.<sup>58</sup> With the changing stance on Islamism initiated by Presidents Putin and Karimov, and especially following the 9/11 attacks on the US, the Nazarbayev government gave up its *laissez-faire* approach to Islam and joined in the US-led 'global war on terror' by introducing tougher religious legislation and policy. The Kazakhstani government and the muftiate mimicked their Russian and Uzbek counterparts in legitimising the dichotomy of 'traditional' (i.e. home-grown, apolitical Islam) and 'untraditional' (foreign and radical Islam). The latter was securitised and treated under anti-terrorist and anti-extremist legislation. In December 2003 President Nazarbayev authorised the creation of the Anti-Terrorist Centre (ATC) for fighting religious [Islamic-G.Y.] extremism on the territory of Kazakhstan. Between 2003 and 2006 the ATC carried out the deportation of 36 foreign Islamic preachers and activists to Pakistan, Turkey, China, Uzbekistan and Russia.<sup>59</sup> In 2004 the Kazakhstani authorities, mirroring the anti-Islamist measures adopted in Uzbekistan in the wake of the Tashkent Islamist bombings earlier in the year, imposed a ban on the activities of 'international extremist organisations'.<sup>60</sup> The authorities closed the South Kazakhstan Humanitarian Academy in Shymkent on the grounds of its alleged dissemination of 'untraditional' radical Islam. The pro-government muftiate introduced a *maddhab* test for local imams with the aim of cleansing the official Islamic structures of followers of 'untraditional' *madhhabs*, such as Hanbalism, Shafiism and Malikism.

In October 2011 the Kazakhstani parliament passed a new restrictive Religious Law which recognised the historic role of 'traditional' Hanafi Islam (along with the Christian Orthodox Church) in the cultural and spiritual development of the Kazakhstani nation. The law prescribed re-registration of all religious organisations and banned prayers in schools, prisons, military bases and other state institutions. This law bore a striking

resemblance to the 1997 Russian Religious Law which pioneered the use of the legal categories of 'traditional' and 'untraditional' religions. Under the new law a number of Islamic institutes and dozens of madrasas and mosques failed to get re-registered and became illegal. As a result, by 2012 there was only one registered Islamic university – the NurMubarak university in Almaty. Many madrasas were closed and the number of registered ones was reduced to five.<sup>61</sup> In 2011 President Nazarbayev created a special Government department, the Agency for Religious Affairs (ARA) under the leadership of Kairat Lama Sharif, a professional diplomat, to strengthen Astana's control over the religious sphere.<sup>62</sup> The ARA, which is staffed by secular apparatchiks with limited or non-existent expertise in Islam, has become directly involved in the appointment of mosque imams and Islamic teachers, as well as in matters related to waqf, hajj and other Islam-related issues.<sup>63</sup>

The official propagation of 'traditional' Kazakh Hanafi Islam and the demonstrative attack on 'untraditional' Salafi Islam has gone side by side with the marginalising or even persecution of the bearers of qoja-centred Sufism, as well as of genuine adherents of Hanafi madhhab. The government, the ARA and the muftiate have spent substantial resources on hosting in Kazakhstan numerous international congresses and conferences dedicated to Abu Hanifa, the programmes of which were characterised by official exchanges of pleasantries and presentations on the role of qoja Ahmad Yasawi in Kazakh history, by speeches on medieval Islamic literary works and archaeological artifacts, and by the consistent avoidance of any in-depth analysis of processes within the contemporary Kazakhstani umma (Islamic community).<sup>64</sup> At the same time, however, in 2011 the authorities arrested Yasawi/Qadiri shaykh Ismatulla Abdugappar, his deputy Professor Sayat Ibrayev and seven other activists of the society and sentenced them to lengthy periods of imprisonment while their Internet sites which, ironically, promoted the teaching of qoja Ahmad Yasawi were blocked.<sup>65</sup>

At the same time, in 2012 the Kazakhstan government made the Kazakh-Egyptian Islamic University Nur (formerly NurMubarak University) the main provider of higher Islamic education in Kazakhstan under the leadership of Egyptian professor Mahmud Fahmi Hijazi, a specialist in shari'a law. This university has provided teaching of Islam and shari'a using the Al-Azhar curriculum which reflects the Shafia and Maliki (rather than Hanafi), madhhabs prevailing in Egypt.<sup>66</sup> Also, in February 2013 the Nazarbayev government appointed a new young mufti, Yerzhan Mayamerov (b.1972), a graduate of Al-Azhar University, who has been entrusted with 'issuing fatwas (Islamic rulings) in line with the Hanafi madhhab.'<sup>67</sup> Given the strong anti-Sufi position of the new mufti and his strict adherence to Islam of Egyptian flavour, it is reasonable to assume that he will apply the Egyptian-based legal Islamic rulings to Kazakhstan and will endorse the ongoing suppression of Sufism, including qoja-centred Sufism, even though it is rhetorically perceived as inseparable from Kazakh-ness. No wonder that among the first rulings issued by the new mufti were the lifting of a ban on Islamic prayer rooms in public places and on wearing hijab (head scarf), which were introduced by his predecessor in 2011.<sup>68</sup>

## Conclusion

This oddly ambivalent official position – even perhaps confusion – over religious policy is the result of a combination of two factors, primarily. One is the Islamic illiteracy of President Nazarbayev and his political associates, a generation that was so heavily Sovietised and secularised that it remains extraordinarily ignorant about Islam in any form. The other is the increasing political and governmental influence of qur'anists – a

younger generation of Kazakhs who identify themselves consciously as Muslims, but whose notions of Islam – primarily of a Salafi nature – have been shaped either by the Internet or by foreign study under the Bolashak programme, including in the USA and Western Europe.<sup>69</sup> What influence the qur'anists belonging to the political, administrative and business élite may have had or be having is not easily traced or documented, since it has not yet revealed itself overtly in the form of government policies or discourses. For the time being they subscribe publicly to Nazarbayev's secular policies; privately, however, their views and behaviour have been increasingly affected by their rediscovered Muslim-ness, reflected in their reliance on the Qur'an as the only source of spiritual truth. Consequently, though they dress in Western style, they are to be seen at prayers in Nur-Astana mosque in Astana,<sup>70</sup> they refrain from alcohol and comply strictly with Islamic dietary requirements (halal); and they diligently observe the fasting and other religious requirements of Ramadan. Significantly, they have been known to denounce traditional Kazakh Islam associated with Sufi shaykhs and other intermediaries between Allah and His followers.<sup>71</sup>

This generational dualism with respect to Islam within the current political and business elite produces differing vectors in the search for the 'national idea' believed to be essential for Kazakhstani nation-building. According to its President, the keystone of the Kazakhstan national idea is national unity.<sup>72</sup> The challenge, of course, is how this is to be achieved in a poly-ethnic, poly-confessional state such as Kazakhstan. That this is very much an open question awaiting resolution is clear from Nazarbayev's address to his people in 1997 which explicitly recognised that the nation faces a strategic choice on its future direction but acknowledges that there is 'no consensus in society about it.'<sup>73</sup> Significantly, Nazarbayev's reflections on the achievement of the 'national idea,' having affirmed national unity as the primary component, went on to identify a strong competitive economy and intellectual strength as the second and third elements. (Specifically, Nazarbayev wants to see Kazakhstan join the top 50 most competitive nations.) What is most striking here is the absence of any reference to the place of religion, or culture generally, in the presidential vision of nation-building. How far, in the longer term, is such a pragmatic, secular conception of Kazakhstan compatible with the de facto Salafi orientation of an influential younger élite? Though its Constitution (1995) proclaims Kazakhstan a democratic and secular state the seeds have been sown for the eventual emergence in the public sphere of a quite different, non-secular and, at least by classic Western liberal notions, non-democratic ideology – and this has occurred, ironically, at least in part because the country's economic success has made access to other cultures available to an educated élite, through Bolashak and other means. While Nazarbayev is alive and in command it is of course most unlikely that the public face of Kazakhstani politics and governance will change. But beneath the apparent cohesion of its youthful national life imposed by Nazarbayev and his associates there may well be powerful cultural and ideological forces at play which could one day disrupt the carefully fostered image of national unity and the current regime's conception of the national idea.

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## Notes on contributor

Galina M. Yemelianova is Senior Lecturer in Eurasian Studies at the Centre for Russian and East European Studies at the University of Birmingham, UK. She heads the University of Birmingham Research Group on the Caucasus and Central Asia and teaches an Msc Pathway on the Caucasus and Central Asia. She has been researching history and contemporary politics in the Middle East and Muslim Eurasia for more than two decades. Her publications include *Yemen During the First Ottoman Rule (1538–1635)* (1988, Nauka Press), *Russia and Islam: A Historical Survey* (2002, Palgrave), *Islam in Post-Soviet Russia: Public and Private Faces* (co-editor and co-author, 2003, Routledge Curzon) and *Radical Islam in the former Soviet Union* (2010, Routledge).

Author's postal address: Centre for Russian and East European Studies, College of Social Sciences, Muirhead Tower, The University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, Birmingham, B15 2TT, UK.

## Notes

1. The name 'qoja' is the Kazakh form of the Persian word 'khwaja.'
2. See more on construction of national identity in post-Soviet Kazakhstan in Spehr and Kassanova, Kazakhstan, 135–37.
3. According to the census of 2009 ethnic Kazakhs numbered over 10 million, or 63%, of the total population of over 16 million.
4. Oralmans are descendants of Kazakhs who fled the Kazakh steppe under the advance of Russian and subsequently Soviet expansion. Between 1991 and 2008 Kazakhstan accommodated over 700,000 oralmans. Mendikulova, *Ethnic Politics*.
5. By the beginning of the eighth century AD Mawarannahr was incorporated into the Islamic Caliphate. The region's geographical proximity to Islamicised Iran predetermined the cultural Iranicisation of its sedentary inhabitants. From the end of the ninth century, Islam of the Hanafi madhhab was the official religion of a succession of states which emerged in Mawarannahr. By the eleventh century there developed a regional form of Sunni Hanafi Islam, known as al-Maturidiyya. The latter derived from the name of prominent local Islamic scholar Abu Mansur al-Maturidi al-Samarqandi (d.944) who elaborated a regional form of kalam (Islamic scholastic theology) which legitimised the synthesis of the Hanafi school of Sunni Islam with local pre-Islamic beliefs, customs and practices. During this period Mawarannahr's cities of Samarqand and Bukhara developed into major world centres of Islamic scholarship and culture.
6. Krivets, *Islam*, 6–19; Roy, *The New Central Asia*, 5; the author's interview with Professor of Kazakh history Zaur Abylkhozhin. Almaty, 4 April 2013.
7. Aq suyek were represented by tore and qojas. The tore claimed their descent from Genghizids and served as the main pool for Kazakh khans and other top military officials. By comparison, the qojas (Sufi shaykhs) claimed their descent from Arabs and embodied religious authority. Privratsky, *Muslim Turkistan*; DeWeese, *Studies on Sufism and The Yasavi Sufi Tradition*. As has been well documented, the Kazakh qojas exemplified a local version of the khojagan – representatives of a spiritual line of Sufi teachers across wider Central Asia, including Xinjiang. Trimmingham, *The Sufi Orders*, 59; DeWeese, *Studies on Sufism*, 12; Privratsky, *Muslim Turkistan*, 37; Basilov and Karmysheva, *Islam u Kazakhov* and Frank, *Muslim Religious Institutions*.
8. The author's interview with the deputy mufti of Kazakhstan, shaykh-ul-Islam, Muhammad Husayn ibn Usman Alsabekov. Almaty, 22 April 2012.
9. The Kazakh Khanate was formed in the region of Zhetysu in northern Mawarannahr. Its political and religious centre was in Yassy, the present-day town of Turkistan in southern Kazakhstan. In the sixteenth century the Kazakhs split into three federations of clans, known as the juzes (literally 'hundreds' in Kazakh), or hordes, each with its own khan. The juzes subdivided in clans which consisted of rus (extended families). The Kishi Juz (Small Horde) occupied the territory of the western part of present-day Kazakhstan, the Orta Juz (Middle

- Horde) of the central and north-eastern parts and the Uli Juz (Great Horde) of the south-eastern part. Between 1801 and 1845 most of the Kishi Juz was included in the Bukey Horde, also known as the Inner Horde which was located north of the Caspian Sea in between the Ural and Volga rivers. 530
10. The author's interviews with Kazakh historian Nazira Nurtazina. Almaty, 1 April 2013; and with Professor Rustam Shodiyev at the Samarkand Institute of Foreign Languages. Samarkand, 10 April 2013.
  11. Privratsky, *Muslim Turkistan*, 1; and Frank, *Muslim Religious Institutions*, 278. 535
  12. The Qubrawiyya was founded by Najm al-Din Qubra (1145–1220) of Khwarazm and the Qadiriyya was founded by Sayed Abdul Qader Gilani al-Amoli (1077–1166) of the Iranian province of Mazandaran.
  13. The Naqshbandi tariqa was founded by Baha al-Din Naqshband Bukhari (1318–1389) of Bukhara. 540
  14. Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya is a branch of Naqshbandi tariqa which was founded by shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi al-Faruqi (1564–1624), known as Mujaddid ['renovator,' in Arabic] in northern India during the Monghul rule. Mujaddidis pursued the renovation of Islam through strict adherence to Sunna and shari'a. Olcott, *Sufism*, 10.
  15. For example, members of the qoja clan of Babadjanov were prominent figures in the administration of the Inner Horde under Jahangir Khan in the first half of the nineteenth century. Frank, *Muslim Religious Institutions*, 280. 545
  16. Frank, *Muslim Religious Institutions*, 280, 289; and the author's interview with Professor Abylkhozhin, Almaty, 4 April 2013.
  17. The incorporation of the Kazakh Juzes into the Russian empire occurred in several stages. The Kishi Juz was annexed by Russia in 1730; the Orta Juz in 1740 and the Ulli Juz in 1846. Markov, *Kochevniki Azii*, 136–7. 550
  18. By 1915 the Slavic population in the Kazakh steppe well exceeded a million. Abdakimov, *Istoriya*, 232.
  19. By the end of the nineteenth century, the number of Kazakh graduates of madrasas much exceeded that of the Russo-Kazakh schools. Frank, *Muslim Religious Institutions*, 295. 555
  20. Jadidism was pioneered by Ismail Gasprinskii, a pro-European minded Crimean Tatar who in 1881 established the first jadid madrasa. Later on jadid schools – the syllabus of which included the teaching of non-Islamic subjects, such as history, geography and science – proliferated in the Tatar-populated regions of the Russian empire. In the Kazakh steppe they catered for the growing needs of those representatives of the Kazakh Muslim elite who, like Tatar jadids, advocated a deeper intellectual, economic and political integration of Russia's Muslims within the nation-wide process of modernisation. 560
  21. Olcott, *The Kazakhs*, 101–2; Dave, *Kazakhstan*, 44.
  22. The author of the 'Small October' policy was F. Goloshekin, Secretary of the Kazakh Party Committee between 1925 and 1933. The Kazakhs' response to this policy consisted of over 370 mass revolts which occurred in the 1920s and an exodus of over a million Kazakhs to other Central Asian republics and neighbouring countries. As a result of mass migrations, hunger and political repression in the 1920–30s, the number of ethnic Kazakhs in Kazakhstan was reduced by 49%. Abdakimov, *Istoriya*, 235. 570
  23. Abdakimov, *Istoriya*, 236; and Alexandrov, *Uneasy Alliance*, 25.
  24. Chechens and other Muslims from the North Caucasus brought with them different Islamic practices associated with different madhhabs, Shafi'ism in particular.
  25. Muminov, 'Fundamentalist Challenges,' 258; and Olcott, 'Sufism in Central Asia,' 15.
  26. In 1943 Moscow authorised the creation of four regional muftiates. They were: the muftiate of Central Asia and Kazakhstan (SADUM) with its centre in Tashkent (Uzbekistan); the muftiate of central Russia with its centre in Ufa (Bashkortostan); the muftiate of the North Caucasus with its centre in Buynaksk (Daghestan); and the muftiate of Transcaucasus with its centre in Baku (Azerbaijan). From 1948 SADUM was the leading muftiate on the territory of the USSR. Until the 1980s it was headed by muftis belonging to the Babakhan dynasty who distanced themselves from the local Islamic tradition intertwined with Sufism and de facto adhered to Salafi Islam. Naumkin, *Radical Islam*, 39. 575
  27. Thus, in the post-war period, most mullas of all Kazakhstani registered mosques – which numbered over 30 – were ethnic Uzbeks. Karagiannis, *Political Islam*, 29. 580

28. The author's interview with Battal Dzhanabayev, former editor-in chief of the newspaper Enbek Tuyi/Znamya Truda [Banner of Labour]. Taraz, 12 April 2012. 585
29. Of special significance were the South Kazakhstan Humanitarian Academy in Shymkent, funded by the Jamaat al-Islah Al-Ijtima'iy (Society for Social Reform, Kuwait), the Kazakh-Turkish Universities of Ahmad Yasawi in Taraz and Turkistan, co-funded by Turkey, the Aga Khan-funded University of Central Asia in the town of Tekeli in Taldykorgan region, and the Nur-Mubarak Islamic University in Almaty, co-funded by the government of Egypt. Kazakhs received financial assistance to conduct hajj and 'umra' (small hajj) to Mecca and Medina and to study in Islamic institutions abroad. 590
30. In 1992 the first edition of the Qur'an in the Kazakh language was published.
31. The author's interview with Dr Tanzharyk Turgankulov, lecturer of Religious Studies, Taraz Pedagogical Institute. Taraz, 14 April 2012. 595
32. The author's interview with the deputy mufti of Kazakhstan, shaykh-ul-Islam, Muhammad Husayn ibn Usman Alsabekov. Almaty, 22 April 2012.
33. Followers of Ibrahim-Hazrat have concentrated in the village of Qusshi-Ata, which is 15 km from the town of Turkistan, as well as the area around the shrines of Ishan-baba and Abd al-Wahid-qari. They have used a silent dhikr (remembrance of Allah) and claimed their disengagement from politics. 600
34. Nasrettin-qari is a son of Ishan-Baba shaykh who preceded Ibrahim-Hazrat.
35. Thus, Ibrahim-Hazrat's sisila does not contain shaykh Sirhindi al-Faruqi (d.1624), the founder of the Mujaddidi Naqshbandi sub-order. This finding contradicts the portrayal of Ibrahim-Hazrat as a Naqshbandi-Mujaddidi in Olcott, Sufism, 19. 605
36. In Almaty Ibrahim-Hazrat's khalifa has been Dayrabay Rysbay, based in the Orbita mosque. Until 2010 his khalifa in Janbyl and southern Kazakhstan was Qurban 'Ali Akhmedov. The group included both men and women from low income families. Ibrahim-Hazrat also had murids (disciples) in Russia among ethnic Russian, Tatar and Moldovan Muslims. 610
37. Following Ibrahim-Hazrat's death in 2009 the group's leadership has been contested by several members of his inner circle. It is alleged that he was succeeded by shaykh Qurban 'Ali Akhmedov. It is significant that Qurban 'Ali deviated from the apolitical stance of the Naqshbandi qojas and called for the creation of a Naqshbandi political party. It is believed that in 2010 Qurban 'Ali Akhmedov moved to Damascus. The author's interviews with Nasrettin-qari, son of Ishan-baba, predecessor of Ibrahim-Hazrat. Village of Qusshi-Ata, Turkistan, 20 April 2012, and with Professor Ashirbek Muminov at the Institute of Oriental Studies. Almaty, 12 May 2011. 615
38. In the 1980s Ismatulla fought on the side of the mujahedeen (Islamic fighters) against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Until the late 1990s he was in Pakistan where he was exposed to fundamentalist Islam. Olcott, Sufism, 32. 620
39. The author's interview with Professor Ashirbek Muminov at the Institute of Oriental Studies. Almaty, 12 May 2011.
40. The author's interview with Dr Tanzharyk Turgankulov, lecturer of Religious Studies, Taraz Pedagogical Institute. Taraz, 14 April 2012. 625
41. Mendikulova, Ethnic Politics.
42. Meyrambekova, 'Obzor,' 283.
43. In 2005 the Hizb al-Tahrir, despite its consistent rejection of violence, was officially qualified as an 'extremist' organisation and banned. For more on Hizb al-Tahrir's activity in Central Asia see Yemelianova, Radical Islam and Karagiannis, Political Islam. 630
44. Karagiannis, Political Islam, 65; the author's interview with Dr Tanzharyk Turgankulov, lecturer of Religious Studies, Taraz Pedagogical Institute. Taraz, 14 April 2012.
45. Tablighi Jamaat is a Deobandi (Salafi) Islamic organisation which was formed in 1926 in north India as a reaction to the majority Hindu culture and the British political domination. Since then the Tablighi Jamaat has evolved into one of the largest Islamic organisations worldwide. By 2012 it had a presence in nearly 213 countries and a total following of between 100 and 150 million people. The majority of the followers of Tablighi Jamaat live in South Asia. 635
46. The author's interview with Professor Dzhililov at the Institute of Oriental Studies. Almaty, 4 April 2013. 640
47. Soldiers of Khalifat.



49. The author's interview with Dr Tanzharyk Turgankulov, lecturer of Religious Studies, Taraz Pedagogical Institute. Taraz, 14 April 2012.
49. The author's conversations with Kazakhs from western Kazakhstan, Almaty, 2011–13.
50. Isaacs, *Party System*, 44. 645
51. Kazakhstan National Opinion Poll, 13.
52. The author's interview with Dr Tanzharyk Turgankulov, lecturer of Religious Studies, Taraz Pedagogical Institute. Taraz, 14 April 2012.
53. In 2000 Ratbek Nysanbai-uly was removed from his office following accusations of venality and incompetence and replaced by Absattar hajjee Derbessally (2000–13), a professional Arabist and diplomat. In 2013 he was removed because of his theological inadequacy and replaced by Yerzhan Mayamerov (b.1972), a graduate of Al-Azhar University. 650
54. The university's name NurMubarak was made out of the names of the Presidents of Kazakhstan and Egypt, Nursultan Nazarbayev and Hosni Mubarak. In 2012, in response to political changes in Egypt, resulting in the overthrow of President Mubarak in 2011, the university's name was changed to 'Kazakh-Egyptian Islamic University Nur.' 655
55. In 2011 Kazakhstan chaired the OIC.
56. Among these were the Kazakh National Independence Party Alash under the leadership of Aron Atabek and Rashid Yutoshev and the League of Muslim Women under the leadership of Alia Abdukarim Qyzy (Nugmanova, d.2005), both of which were active in 1990–91. Alia Abdukarim Qyzy, who was an oralman from China, campaigned, for example, for the legalisation of polygamy and separate education for girls. 660
57. At the forefront of this movement were Muhammad Sodiq Yusuf (Uzbekistan), Akbar Turajonzade (Tajikistan) and other 'young imams' and activists of underground hujras who followed the teachings of local Islamic scholars such as Shami-Damulla (1867–1932), Hajjee Domla (1892–1989) and other influential Salafi Islamic thinkers, both local and foreign. They were pivotal in the deposing in 1989 of SADUM's mufti Shamsuddin Babakhanov whom they accused of corruption and close links with the KGB. Following the disintegration of SADUM along national lines the 'young imams' established their control over the newly formed national muftiates and began to campaign for the greater spiritual and political role of the Islamic establishment, the restoration of an Islamic infrastructure on a pre-revolutionary scale and the state-sponsored promotion of knowledge of Islam and the Arabic language. Muminov, 'Fundamentalist Challenges,' 254–6; Naumkin, *Radical Islam*, 52; and Akiner, 'Islam,' 74. 665
58. There were reports of the activities in southern Kazakhstan of members of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Hizb al-Tahrir (HT) and their splinter groups, all of which defied the existing Central Asian secular regimes as being kafir (non-believing in Allah) and sought the re-Islamicisation of local society and the eventual creation of an Islamic state. 670
59. Terrorism in Kazakhstan.
60. The list of banned organisations included Taleban, Boz Gurd [Grey Wolves], Laskshar-i-Toiba [Army of the Good], Jamaat al-Islah al-Ijtimayi [Society for Social Reform], HT, People's Congress of Kurdistan (PKK), IMU, the Islamic Party of Eastern Turkestan, the Usbat al-Ansar [Group of Allies] and the Muslim Brotherhood. 680
61. They were the madrasa of Abu Hanifa in Almaty, the madrasa 'Astana' in Astana, the madrasa 'Abu Bakr Sydyr' in Pavlodar, the madrasa in Shymkent and the madrasa 'Aqtobe' in Aqtobe. Interview with mufti Derbessali, <http://meshit.kz/ru/history.html>, accessed on 3 September 2012. 685
62. Kairat Lama Sharif (b.1962) has an academic background in Arabic philology. From 1993 till 2011 he was in diplomatic service. Prior to his appointment as the chairman of ARA he was Kazakhstan's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia. 690
63. Kogda zhe Lama Sharif Nakonets Otdelit Bogovo ot Kesareva? [When will Lama Sharif Separate Secular and Religious affairs?]. <http://islam.kz/node/528>, accessed on 11 September 2012.
64. The author's observations during Islam-related conferences which took place in Almaty in 2010–2012. 695
65. Shaykh Ismatulla was sentenced to 14 years imprisonment, Sayat Ibrayev to 12 years and others from five to nine years, <http://www.dn.kz>, accessed on 14 April 2012.
66. The university's board of trustees also includes Talgat Afifi, Egyptian Minister of Waqf, while Usama al-'Abd, rector of Al-Azhar Islamic University in Cairo, acts as advisor.

67. Prior to this appointment mufti Mayamerov worked at the Fatwa Department of the Muftiate in Egypt. Ex-mufti Derbessaly was appointed Director of Suleimenov Oriental Studies Institute in Almaty. 700
68. 'Spiritual Management of Muslims of Kazakhstan to Start Issuing Fatwa by Shari'a Laws.' In TengriNews, 22 February 2013, <http://en.tengrinews.kz/religion/Spiritual-Management-of-Muslims-of-Kazakhstan-to-start-issuing-fatwas-by-Shariah-17165/>, accessed on 29 May 2013. 705
69. 'Bolashak' ['Future,' in Kazakh] is an academic scholarship programme established by Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbayev in 1993. The programme funds the studies of talented Kazakh youth in leading international institutions in foreign countries.
70. This assertion is based on the author's ethnographic observation of Friday prayers in the Nur-Astana mosque during the period between 2011 and 2013. 710
71. From ethnographic observation and semi-structured interviews with young representatives of the Kazakh political and business elite, who required anonymity, Astana and Almaty, April 2011–March 2013.
72. 'Otvety Glavy Gosudarstva v Priamom Efire Respublikanskikh Radio- i Telekanalov na Voprosy Kazakhstansev' [Live Response of the Head of State to Questions from the Kazakhstanian Public]. In Kaziinform, 13 November 2009. 715
73. Nazarbayev, Kazakhstan.

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